

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With European Community Leaders

May 7, 1993

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, what makes you so confident that you're going to get a consensus, and a consensus for what? Air strikes? Lifting the arms embargo?

The President. First of all, I think I should receive a report from Mr. Christopher before I make a final comment on that. The Secretary is coming home, and we're going to meet. We're going to meet with our principals, and we're all going to compare notes. I want to get a good personal briefing from Senator Nunn and Senator Lugar and any of the other Senators who want to talk to me who went on that trip.

I just have the feeling based on my conversations in the last week and the reports I've been getting that we can reach a common policy, particularly in light of the events of the last 2 days. And we'll just see how we do and go forward.

Q. Mr. President, do you feel that you could reach a common policy that would not include military force if the allies are resistant to that but a policy that could still be successful and that wouldn't undermine your authority?

The President. I think we have to turn up the heat and keep the pressure on. You know what our policy has been, what we've been pushing. I think I shouldn't say more until after I see Secretary Christopher.

Q. Mr. President, how does Belgrade's action yesterday change the equation, if at all?

The President. It's hard to say. It was welcome if it's real and if it can be followed through on. But I have to get an intelligence report on what the practical impact of that is. That's one of the things we'll be discussing. Our weekends the last few weeks have been given over to these kinds of matters, and I expect tomorrow morning I'll talk about it quite a bit.

Q. While the deliberations are going on, won't the Serbs be simply confirming their hold on all this land and killing more people? How do you—

The President. We'll have to wait, and we'll have to see. But that will obviously, at least for me, it will affect how I view this and what I will do.

Q. Is it strange to have Milosevic on your side?

The President. Is it strange to what?

Q. To have Milosevic on your side?

The President. Yes, it's an unusual feeling. And I hope he'll stay there.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Q. Mr. President, do you expect the Europeans to come along now and support the use of force in Bosnia?

The President. Well, I think that we have to take stronger steps. We have to keep turning the pressure up. I think that obviously some of what has been done is having an effect, even though the so-called assembly did not approve the Vance-Owen plan the Serb leaders seem to be in favor of.

I'm going to discuss that with the Prime Minister and with President Delors, and then we're going to talk tomorrow among ourselves. My Secretary of State is just coming home now, and after that I'll have more to say.

Q. Mr. President, do you find Mr. Milosevic's actions and the sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs encouraging?

The President. Yes, I hope it's real. I haven't had time to be advised about the practical impact of it in the short run, but perhaps it will have a psychological impact. I would think these fights between the Serbs and the Bosnia Muslims and the Croats, they go back so many centuries, they have such powerful roots that it may be that it's more difficult for the people on the ground to make a change in their policy than for the leaders. And so I think it may be that over the next several days some change can be effected on the ground. And if it is a genuine effort by Mr. Milosevic, then of course I would be quite happy about that, and we'll see what we can do with it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:40 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.